CAI Celebrates National Women’s History Month
Spotlighting women leaders in the community association industry.

What is the best career decision you have made, and how has that impacted your career path?

My best career decision was to make a mid-level career change of professions, from community management to banking for management companies. Having worked in community management for close to fifteen years, I was offered an opportunity to work as a banker, dedicated exclusively to serving management companies and their clients. The bank that selected me was the bank who also served me, so I knew what it was like to be a customer of an industry specific bank. The decision also made sense because I had learned the art of sales and marketing from the management company I worked for. I learned how to analyze a prospective customer’s needs and create a solution that addressed those needs and resonated with them.

This did not make me a banker, though. Banking is a highly technical and more highly regulated industry. I learned about the products we sold from the subject matter experts at the bank, but I self-taught many of the other things that bankers need to know like the difference between bps and eps. All in the middle of the financial meltdown, where being a banker, especially with a Too Big To Fail bank was none too sexy. I persevered, knowing that what I was doing for management companies helped them improve their businesses.

How did you climb the ladder in your field and what was the experience like? Did you feel that there was room to negotiate and move up and if so, what was your experience like?

I was fortunate to work for a growing company that gave me challenges every year, which I embraced. Whether it was a more complex community, a supervisory role, a special project or an opportunity to blend sales and marketing with management, I enthusiastically approached each one as an honor. If my company needed a role filled and my contributions helped my company, then I happily accepted. I seemed to be the team member who would reliably accept some of these tasks that are important for a business but not necessarily part of my job. I was the person who served on committees, attended Chamber of Commerce events, and represented the company in the community as a proxy for the President of my company.

What I didn’t realize at the time was how much those new roles were helping develop me as a professional. While she never said it, I suspect that my boss knew exactly what she was doing for me. Through the exposure to new challenges and opportunities I learned networking, public speaking, marketing, and sales. Most importantly, she taught me grace under pressure.

Can you describe the level of support that you received from other women in our field and how did women specifically give you that support?

For the 1st 10 years of my career, my only supervisors and managers were women. Their support was provided through coaching, role modeling and access to opportunity. They supported me by exposing me to new things and providing regular feedback.

Our industry is one where “sisterhood” is alive and well. The most important support I received from women is from my network of women friends. Most of my closest, lifelong friends are also women in our industry. We have been each other’s steadfast supporters and champions. We included each other in opportunities, helped start businesses, worked through career changes, did business with each other, volunteered side by side, taught classes together, faced adversity, and had the times of our lives.

What do you foresee as the biggest opportunity to the generation of women behind you in this field?

The biggest opportunity is that the playing field is level. This is an industry with equal access for all qualified professionals regardless of sex. Whether a woman’s affinity is for leadership roles or support positions, or she thrives in IT, accounting, the law, customer service, public service, or sales, there is ample opportunity and successful role models who have come before. Best of all, the women in our industry are willing to share with each other to a higher degree than I have seen in other industries. Finally, the money is getting there, too. Women are paid equally for equal work and have equal opportunity for advancement. We are in an industry that is recession resistant, open to new comers, has room for innovation, while still being able to keep the client’s best interests at heart.

What advice would you give to aspiring young, women professionals in our field?

Be indispensable. It’s a fallacy that no one is indispensable. If you’re contributing by creating value for your company, you’re indispensable. If your value is adding revenue, you’re indispensable. If your value is reducing overhead, you’re indispensable. If your value is innovation, you’re indispensable.

Take advantage of every educational opportunity available and learn from multiple trusted sources. Be open-minded about change. Create a strong network of colleagues, competitors, clients, and business partners. Know who your most steadfast supporters are. Learn from the experience of those before you and use them to become your best self.

What is the level of support that you received in the marketplace and how did men specifically give you that support?

For the first 10 years of my career, my only supervisors and managers were men. Their support was provided through coaching, role modeling and access to opportunity. They supported me by exposing me to new things and providing regular feedback.

Our industry is one where “sisterhood” is alive and well. The most important support I received from men is from my network of women friends. Most of my closest, lifelong friends are also women in our industry. We have been each other’s steadfast supporters and champions. We included each other in opportunities, helped start businesses, worked through career changes, did business with each other, volunteered side by side, taught classes together, faced adversity, and had the times of our lives.

What do you foresee as the biggest opportunity to the generation of men behind you in this field?

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What advice would you give to aspiring young, men professionals in our field?

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